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Northton, Harris

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Excavation

NF 975 912 In August 2010 a small-scale excavation (1x5m) of the Mesolithic layers exposed by coastal erosion was undertaken. Previous fieldwork at the site in 2001 had revealed the first radiocarbon-dated Mesolithic deposits in the Western Isles beneath the later Neolithic and Beaker settlement.

The extent of coastal erosion was monitored by undertaking an EDM survey of the eroding edge in relation to the existing Neolithic and Beaker earthworks and Mesolithic layers. This survey revealed that the exposed Mesolithic deposits in this area of the coast had eroded by about 1m since 2001, but that a greater area of the Neolithic and later remains overlying the Mesolithic deposits have been completely destroyed by coastal erosion.

The excavated area of the Mesolithic deposit was 100% sampled and flotation for plant and animal remains was undertaken. No archaeological features were detected, but a sizable assemblage of Mesolithic lithics, charcoal, carbonised plant macrofossils and animal bones was uncovered. It is proposed that this layer is a buried land surface that incorporates a palimpsest of disturbed and bioturbated hearth deposits containing fuel remnants and food waste.

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